



**Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human  
Rights Defenders (EMHRF)**

**ACTIVITY REPORT**

*Public Version*

**2008**

**[www.emhrf.org](http://www.emhrf.org)**

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## 1. Introduction

While reforms in the promotion and defence of human rights remain relatively unambitious in the southeast Mediterranean region, concrete progress has been made particularly in the context of the adoption of laws strengthening the participation of women and the fight against corruption. The general climate however was marked by the fact that repression continued to grow, and human rights defenders in the southern Mediterranean have continued to carry on the difficult task of promoting and defending human rights.

In Tunisia, an unprecedented movement of peaceful social protest began in January 2008, challenging unfair employment practices in the south western region of the country – a region where poverty and unemployment have reached dismal levels. According to Tunisia's major human rights organisations this movement, even though limited in its geographical scope, is the longest-lasting and strongest social upheaval in the country's recent history, as well as its most mature in terms of the demands made by the protesters and of the methods employed. The protest raises such issues as the right to form a union, the right to work, the right to an equal share of national wealth, the protection of the environment, freedom of expression and the fight against corruption. The government's response has been to deploy an unprecedented level of police and military repression, leading to the brutalisation of families and the destruction of private property as a form of reprisal. A number of leaders of Tunisia's only national labour union as well as activists have been found guilty of a 'criminal conspiracy against people and property' and 'armed rebellion', with sentences of between two and eight years being imposed in total disregard of principles such as the presumption of innocence, the adversarial procedure, open courts, the defendant's rights and the right to physical integrity<sup>1</sup>.

In Syria, following a meeting of pro-democratic opposition forces in late 2007 that was attended by more than 160 political activists, human rights defenders, intellectuals and artists gathered to discuss the follow-up on the Damascus Declaration for democratic national change, about 40 of those present were arrested and 12 defenders were sentenced to two and a half years' imprisonment in late October 2008. Their only crime was to have called peacefully for the establishment of a democratic system that respects the rights of citizens, guarantees the rights to freedom of expression and association, and brings an end to discrimination based on religious or political beliefs. At the end of proceedings that violated the basic standards governing fair trials, they were convicted of having weakened the national consensus, disseminated false news and encouraged sectarian sentiment or sectarian confrontations, and of belonging to an 'organisation created to alter the financial or social situation of the state'<sup>2</sup>.

These are but two examples of the considerable political, economic and social repression that took place in the region last year, developments that are compounded by conflict situations which had tragic consequences. In 2008, attacks and acts of violence continued unabated in the Maghreb countries and in Iraq, Israel and the Occupied Territories, and civilians continued to represent the majority of the victims.

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<sup>1</sup> See M<sup>e</sup> Houcine Bardi, LL.D., member of the Paris bar, 'Rapport d'observations judiciaires, Procès du 11 décembre 2008 devant le tribunal pénal de Gafsa', CRLDHT (Comité pour le Respect des Libertés et des Droits de l'Homme en Tunisie) and FTCT (Fédération des Tunisiens pour une Citoyenneté des Deux Rives); CRLDHT, 'Tunisie-Rédeyef/Gafsa: The appeal trial confirms the harsh sentences imposed at the lower court against the leaders of the social movement in the mining area. The latter have succeeded in making this trial a plea against torture, nepotism, corruption, criminalization of the right to work and for solidarity', press release, February 5, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> See M<sup>e</sup> Houcine Bardi, LL.D., member of the Paris bar, 'Rapport de mission d'observation judiciaire du procès des 12 membres du Conseil national de la déclaration de Damas pour un changement national et démocratique', Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, joint programme of FIDH, OMCT and the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN), 24 September 2008.

Repeatedly using security concerns as a pretext, the governments of the region continued to add to the range of legislative tools designed to curtail the effective enjoyment of freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression by human rights defenders. New laws have been adopted that give governments ever more restrictive control powers over the governance, funding and activities of autonomous non-governmental organisations (NGOs). To cite but a few examples, the state of emergency was renewed in Egypt in May 2008 and remains in effect in Syria and Algeria. In Jordan, the government has introduced new legislation on charity organisations and social institutions that gives additional discretionary powers to the administrative authorities. Among other things, the registration of associations is now subject to a new authorisation procedure requiring prior approval by the authorities rather than a simple notification as previously. In addition, any donation or grant must be pre-approved by the ministry concerned before it can be received, with penalties for failure to secure prior approval ranging from the dismantling of the organisation to three months' imprisonment. Joining other North African countries in the crackdown on sub-Saharan migrants, Algeria adopted in June 2008 a new law governing the admission, stay and movements of foreigners in its territory. The provisions of this law not only make it a crime for sub-Saharan migrants to enter and stay in Algeria illegally, they also set out prison terms for anyone who 'directly or indirectly facilitates or attempts to facilitate' the illegal stay, movements or departure of a foreigner. This law has the potential to be particularly detrimental to those who are involved in providing assistance and volunteer services to protect migrants' rights.

Furthermore, the subservience of the judicial system to the political authorities has only added to the growing repression practiced against human rights defenders in Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia and Syria. A number of bloggers, independent journalists and lawyers involved in defending human rights have been given sentences ranging from fines to imprisonment of up to two years for having criticised government policy and the working of the judicial system. The authorities have continued to deny associations the possibility of registering in accordance with the law and to use the associations' failure to register as a pretext for prosecuting their members for engaging in 'illegal activities' and to ban funding from abroad in an attempt to deprive NGOs and independent initiatives of the support to which they are legally entitled. Public meetings and peaceful protests organised by human rights groups and NGOs have been banned in Algeria, Syria and Tunisia. In Israel, Tunisia and Syria, a large number of human rights defenders have been prevented or prohibited from travelling freely in their own country or from leaving the country. Several defenders have been the victims of brutality, ill treatment, intimidation and reprisals against friends and colleagues<sup>3</sup>.

All of these measures adopted against human rights organisations and defenders are in violation of the obligations set out in the international instruments to which the countries of the region are parties and which they are contravening<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> For more information, see the reports published by the major international human rights organisations – e.g., Human Rights Watch, *Annual Report 2009*; Amnesty International, *Challenging Repression: Human Rights Defenders in the Middle East and North Africa*, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> These instruments include legal instruments of the United Nations such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the two international covenants on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights; other UN conventions establishing monitoring mechanisms (against torture, racial discrimination, discrimination against women, children's rights, rights of migrant workers and their families); the conventions and standards of the International Labour Organisation; special and non-treaty procedures of the United Nations, the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders; the UN resolution defining the mandate of the Secretary General's Special Representative on the situation of human rights defenders; the EU guidelines on human rights defenders; the association agreements between the EU and the countries of the Mediterranean basin; and the provisions of the national action plans under the ENP.

In light of this regional context, it was essential to provide defenders not only with political support<sup>5</sup> but also with an increased number of grants of financial support, taking into account the need for timeliness, flexibility and discretion, so as to enable them to develop their activities not only as witnesses, advocates and debaters, but also as promoters and defenders of all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

Given this context, the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders (EMHRF) provided support to about 40 initiatives in 2008 that were aimed at supporting 108 defenders, individually or as NGOs, who foster, support, protect and monitor respect for human rights in the region.

## **2. Executive Summary**

The year 2008 highlighted the challenges faced on a regular basis by human rights defenders in the southern and eastern Mediterranean region – challenges that were intimately linked to the nature of their activities as well as to broad political trends at the national and international levels. The requests received by the Foundation reflected these trends and underlined the essential bridging role that the Foundation must play, in cooperation with regional and international bodies active in protecting defenders, in providing effective support to them. These trends – and the actions taken by the EMHRF – revolve mainly around the following issues:

### ***2.1 Crackdown on dissidents, deprivation of freedom and ill treatment***

Many of the region's defenders have had to face deprivation of their freedom during the year, a measure that was often compounded by ill treatment and administrative dismissals. As a result, not only have a number of defenders faced serious health problems, but their families are often in a very precarious situation. The Foundation has accordingly provided assistance to these defenders to enable them to receive adequate medical treatment and to enable their families to cope with the basic requirements for survival.

### ***2.2 Instrumentalisation of the judiciary and harassment***

The pressures exerted against defenders in the region included the denial or lack of legal recognition of human rights activities as well as the physical and psychological harassment of defenders. Groups and organisations involved in defending human rights naturally sought tangible, secure and flexible financial support in order to reorganise their strategies and pursue the activities needed to strengthen, promote and protect human rights and democratisation.

### ***2.3 Especially vulnerable groups***

European decisions to close borders and the ongoing conflicts in Israel/Palestine and Iraq had a grave impact on migrants and refugees in a number of countries in the region. Many people are trapped in sordid camps where they are the victims of discrimination and deprived of access to schooling, jobs and health services. Given the scope of the problem, existing NGOs dedicated to protecting the rights of migrants and asylum seekers in the South have seen their activities grow considerably and a number of new ones have emerged. The Foundation was especially concerned by the fate of groups that might be considered particularly vulnerable and responded by providing support aimed at strengthening the activities of civil society in the region that were targeted at these groups.

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<sup>5</sup> The complementary linkages between existing initiatives related to protection and support for human rights defenders is a primary focus of the EMHRF's intervention strategy, facilitating coordination and the sharing of information while avoiding duplication.

#### ***2.4 Operating difficulties and limited human resources***

Operating capacities and the level of access to financial resources vary greatly among NGOs of the region. Most independent organisations lack the human and physical resources needed to pursue their activities effectively over the long term. In several countries, NGOs have only limited access to funding from outside the region. Many smaller groups want to organise themselves along more professional lines but lack the skills and the support needed to prepare projects that meet the criteria set by major donors. It was necessary to strengthen their human and operating resources by providing small amounts of money, especially since resources of this type are seldom the focus of the major international funding institutions.

### **3. Interventions and Activities in Support of Human Rights Organisations, Groups and Defenders**

The support provided to human rights defenders by the Foundation in 2008 fell into three broad categories of intervention. One should note, however, that it is not possible to distinguish clearly among certain types of intervention, especially between those aimed at strengthening human and physical resources and those intended to support innovative activities.

#### ***3.1 Urgent interventions in support of defenders facing difficulties or at risk***

The EMHRF provided financial assistance in a rapid, tangible and discreet manner to several human rights defenders to help them overcome difficult circumstances and/or, at a critical moment, reinforce the visibility of their work and their prospects for pursuing their activities<sup>6</sup>.

3.1.1. Specifically, the Foundation provided emergency support for defenders who were the targets of psychological harassment and arbitrary legal proceedings because of their views on respect for human rights in their country. This assistance was aimed at sustaining the basic requirements for survival of their families, who faced grave economic difficulties.

The Foundation supported more than 60 families of defenders against whom arbitrary legal proceedings had been launched, often accompanied by dismissal from work, because of their activities in favour of democratisation and respect for human rights in their country. This financial assistance enabled the families to meet such basic needs as paying the rent and buying food, sending the children to school, obtaining health care, securing legal protection and meeting transportation costs for visits to prisons, etc.

3.1.2. The Foundation also supported several defenders whose life was in danger because of serious health problems, thus enabling them to obtain the medical treatment and medications they needed, in their country or abroad. This assistance was provided because their rights had been violated and/or they were unable to assume the costs involved because of their ongoing commitment in defending human rights.

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<sup>6</sup> The amounts involved in these urgent interventions ranged mainly between €900 and €6,000, averaging € 1,800.

The Foundation was a participant, either directly or through a European organisation, in the reimbursement of medical costs for seven defenders who had been sentenced to several years of imprisonment because of their positions in favour of protecting human rights. The Foundation also helped to pay medical examinations for a defender who was not in a position to cover the costs associated with hospitalisation abroad.

3.1.3 In addition, the Foundation provided emergency assistance to an association of human rights defenders that had been targeted by the authorities, to give it the time needed to take steps to stabilise its status and continue its work.

The Foundation continued to provide support to a human rights organisation against which an arbitrary order of dissolution and the freezing of its assets had been decreed without warning because it had adopted positions opposed to government policies and practices, even though such measures contravene international human rights standards.

3.1.4 Finally, the EMHRF supported projects whose success essentially depended on a time-sensitive intervention to heighten their profile and increase the prospects for a successful pursuit of activities in support of human rights. The reasons for providing this assistance had to do with the difficulty of securing funding from other donors safely and in a timely manner.

The Foundation provided urgent funding for the following activities:

- A meeting of the leading bodies of an association to enable it to redefine its priorities and its activities in defence of human rights and to elect a new executive in accordance with democratic principles
- The publication of reports on the situation of human rights, by five defender NGOs
- The payment of rental costs for a meeting place and documentation centre where most activities had stopped because of internal difficulties
- The attendance of two human rights defenders from the South, both lawyers, at strategically important training sessions abroad, to give them an opportunity to develop their ability to work with international mechanisms.

3.1.5. In its urgent interventions, the EMHRF attempted as much as possible to coordinate its work with that of other regional and international organisations that have the mandate to provide political and financial support to human rights defenders. The Foundation contributed in this way to the preparation of press releases or urgent appeals by other regional or international organisations and, in one case, provided funding to a beneficiary in collaboration with another international organisation. As announced in the previous years, there are still many defenders who face serious problems because they have been deprived of their freedom and subjected to ill treatment. In a number of cases, in particular those involving the payment of medical expenses, the Foundation worked with associations based in Europe or in neighbouring countries to ensure that follow-up on the psychological and physical rehabilitation of these defenders, as well as their social reintegration, would take place over the medium and long term. In addition, the Foundation continued its efforts to bolster the capacities of practitioners and associations at the local level by providing training and establishing mechanisms to ensure longer-term support.

### 3.2 Bridging interventions to strengthen human and operational resources

The EMHRF provided financial assistance with the main purpose of strengthening the ability of defenders and associations to create new structures or ensure the effective launching of their work in the region. These interventions have, among other things, made it possible to increase the visibility of

defenders in countries where the political environment and the context in which NGOs operate are particularly difficult, and to ensure they have the resources needed to pursue their work<sup>7</sup>.

3.2.1. In particular, the Foundation supported the training of association members or the establishment of mechanisms aimed at raising the public profile of their activities.

The Foundation supported the organisation of training services aimed at helping local grassroots actors to develop communication and publication tools to promote the activities of their association. The training sessions were given by an association and were attended by about 30 NGO members from remote areas. They focused on writing for the press and producing newspapers for associations.

The Foundation also provided support to a defender who had been active in the NGO movement for many years in order for him to receive ongoing training on the legal mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights and thus strengthen the legal component of his work and of the work of the organisation he is associated with.

The Foundation provided support to two NGOs to help them set up a website and redeploy their activities in the national and international arena.

3.2.2. The Foundation also assumed a portion of the operating costs associated with the consolidation of existing groups or the establishment of new ones in the region (e.g. rental costs, equipment and staffing).

More specifically, the Foundation contributed to the payment of rental costs and the hiring of permanent staff for six NGOs that operated mainly on a volunteer basis, to help them establish a more professional base for their activities and strengthen their ability to pursue their work in the medium to long term.

The Foundation also provided start-up assistance to seven new associations. Thanks to this support, these defenders were able to secure the equipment, premises and staff needed to launch their valuable work.

3.2.3. The Foundation provided support for the advocacy and fund-raising campaign of a small NGO that was facing financial difficulties because of the sensitive nature of its work in its own country and in the region as a whole.

3.2.4. In the context of its role as an intermediary and advisor to its beneficiaries, the Foundation encouraged and facilitated the development of new and/or multi-year strategies backed by a fund-raising programme. The Foundation was thus able to respond strategically to the needs of the organisations concerned and/or to help them in their efforts to approach other donors who may be in a better position to support their activities over the long term. In five specific cases, the Foundation facilitated contacts between NGOs and donors, provided lists of potential donors and assisted in the presentation of funding requests.

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<sup>7</sup> The amounts involved in these capacity-building interventions ranged between €4,800 and €40,000, averaging € 21,500.



### 3.3 Interventions in support of innovative initiatives in light of the regional context

The Foundation provided financial support for projects concerned with subjects that were innovative and/or had a priority component in light of the regional context<sup>8</sup>. It paid particular attention to strengthening the coordination of NGO activities at the national and regional level and to bolstering the protection of the rights of groups that could be considered as being particularly vulnerable or as needing special assistance.

3.3.1. With regard to strengthening the coordination of NGO activities, the Foundation provided support to, among others, groups that are active in fighting impunity, in promoting and protecting economic, social and cultural rights, and in preparing documentation and conducting lobbying activities with a view to promote coordinated reforms in various areas of public policy.

The Foundation supported the establishment of an entity that seeks to strengthen the coordination of NGO activities aimed at securing the recognition and implementation of the fundamental right to truth and justice in the southern Mediterranean. To that end, the entity sought to create a network of NGOs that would share experiences and know-how, and become a lobbying force in dealing with governments and with intergovernmental organisations.

The Foundation supported the establishment of a network comprised of several labour unions active in various areas of the public sector – administration, health care, education, hydraulics, public works, finance and civil protection – to enable them to strengthen the protection and defence of the physical and moral interests of workers at the national level. This entity will be a space for discussion, sharing, solidarity and joint initiatives aimed at protecting the rights and freedoms of labour unions.

The Foundation also supported two innovative projects seeking to observe and analyse public policy regarding respect for civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights by looking at the lessons learned from the joint efforts carried out by NGOs. The documentation and the analysis will be used to develop proposals and strengthen advocacy and follow-up in matters of human rights reforms over the long term.

3.3.2. When it comes to improving the protection of the rights of groups that could be considered as being especially vulnerable or requiring special assistance, the Foundation supported smaller entities working to protect the rights of women, children, the disabled, refugees and migrants in countries of the southern Mediterranean.

The Foundation supported one multi-sectorial project aiming at analysing and assessing the impact of a caravan organised to advise women, the disabled and children of their rights in a remote region, with a view to developing a strategy and plans of action for the longer term.

Furthermore, the Foundation supported three projects with a special focus on the reinforcement of the participation and the rights of women. The specific objectives of these projects were as follows:

- Providing legal aid and training to women who are disadvantaged and marginalised, to enable them to realise their rights in the private and public spheres;
- Strengthening rights protection and access to justice for women belonging to a religious minority, to counter the arbitrary practices of religious legal bodies in the country;
- Providing improved training, legal aid and psychological assistance to women who are the targets of discrimination because of their sexual orientation, as well as advocacy activities aimed at heightening the awareness of policy makers and the general public about their rights.

<sup>8</sup> The amounts involved in these interventions designed to support innovative activities ranged between €9,400 and €40,000, averaging € 20,400.

The Foundation also supported five NGOs with projects aimed at strengthening the protection of the rights of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers in countries of the south-eastern Mediterranean. More specifically, these projects involved:

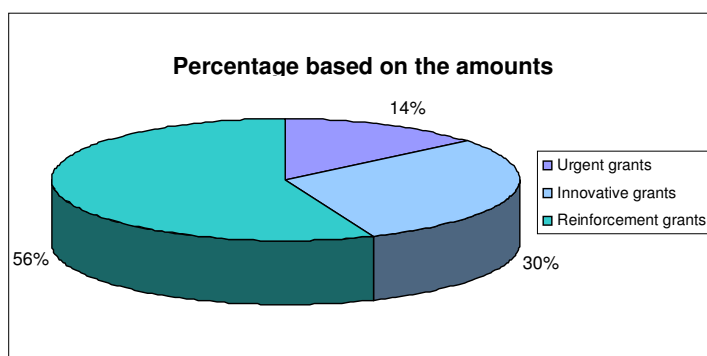
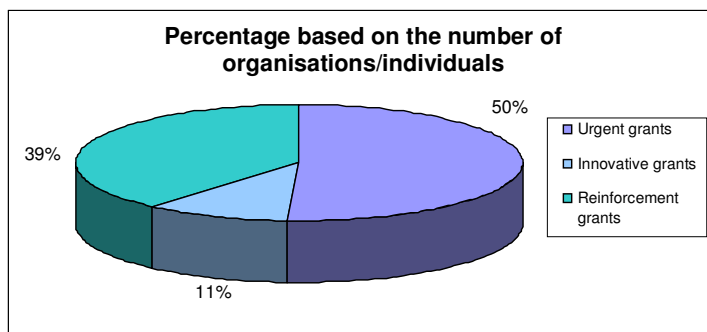
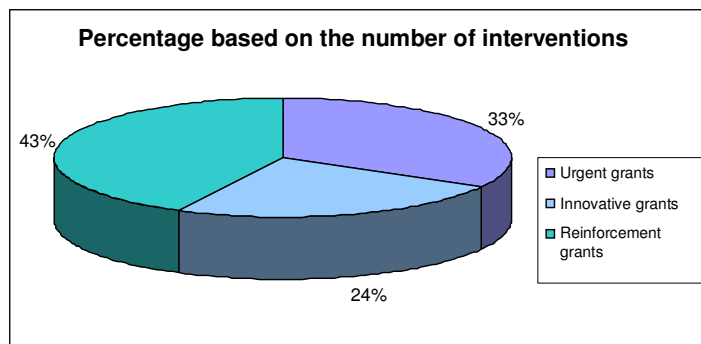
- Establishing an entity designed to provide legal aid to migrants and refugees who are victims of criminal acts or detention and wish to exercise their right to freedom of association;
- Improving the legal protection of migrant workers exposed to exploitation or arbitrary detention;
- Developing a mechanism for monitoring and documenting human trafficking and illegal migrations in rural areas, and for raising awareness about these issues;
- Analysing migration policies and their impact on migrants in countries of the South, especially migrants in transit, and using the findings to raise awareness and develop advocacy activities at national and international levels.
- Strengthening the promotion and protection of the economic, social and cultural rights of child refugees, and in particular their right to education in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

3.3.3. In its role as intermediary to its beneficiaries, the EMHRF has also encouraged some defenders and NGOs to develop contacts with national institutions that have similar projects in their own country or in other countries of the region, as well as with regional and international networks working to promote and defend human rights. Such contacts can be used by these defenders and NGOs to share information and experiences, to discuss the potential for exploiting synergies and coordinating activities, and thus to draw benefits other than financial to increase the impact and viability of their work.

## 4. Quantitative Assessment of Interventions in 2008

To increase the readability of the EMHRF's interventions in 2008, the graphs below are presented depending on the:

### 4.1 Types of interventions

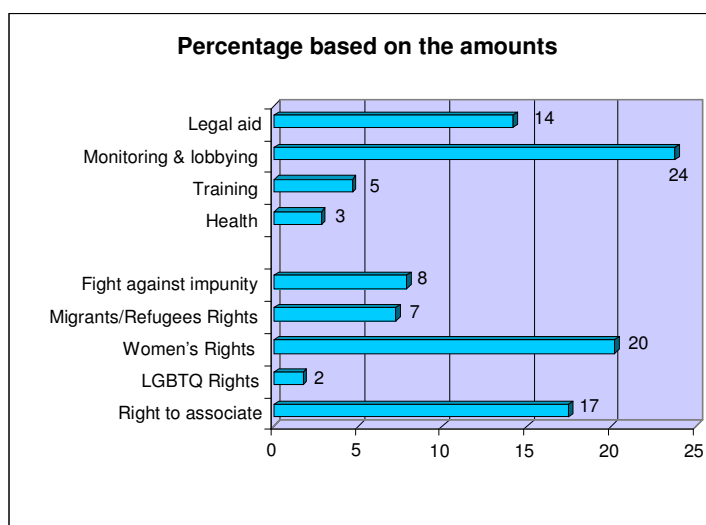
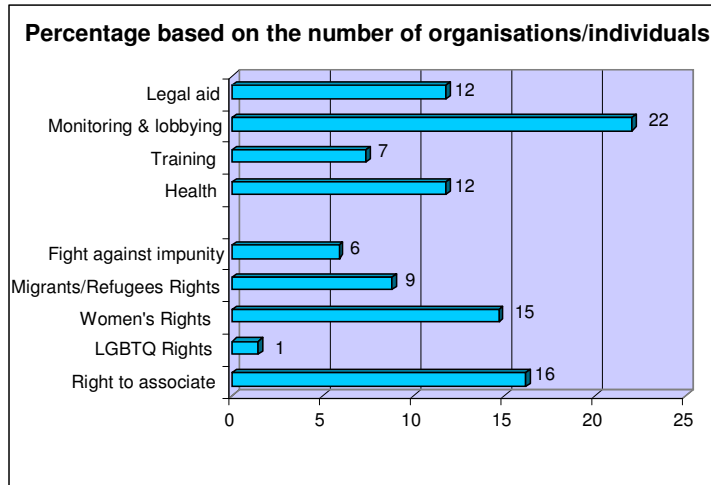
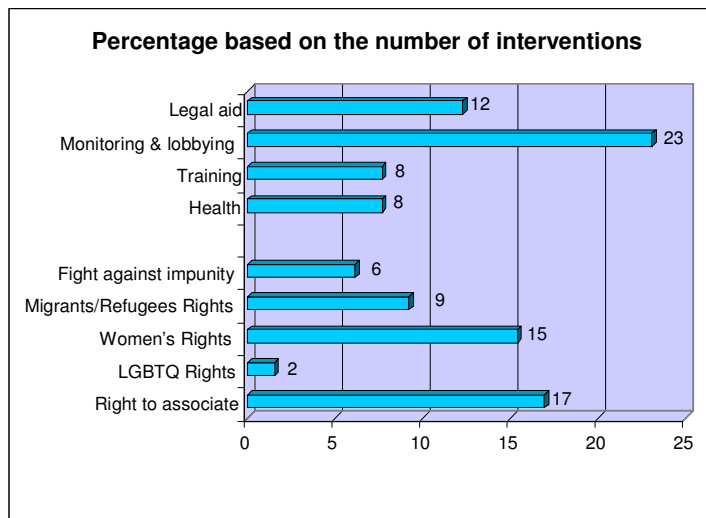


*The percentage of interventions designed to strengthen human and physical resources has remained unchanged from 2007.*

*This category now accounts for the majority of the Foundation's interventions because many independent human rights groups and organisations seek to become more professional and to enhance their ability to pursue their activities. Few donors, however, considers the operational and management costs faced by these organisations as a priority, even though such expenses are necessary in order for these organisations to implement their programmes and longer-term strategies more effectively.*

*As for emergency interventions, the total amount involved remained relatively low, but the number of individuals and organisations receiving support increased compared to the previous year, mainly as a result of high levels of repression targeting defenders and their families, who are faced with severe problems in coping with basic household needs and overcoming their difficult situations.*

## 4.2 Thematic areas

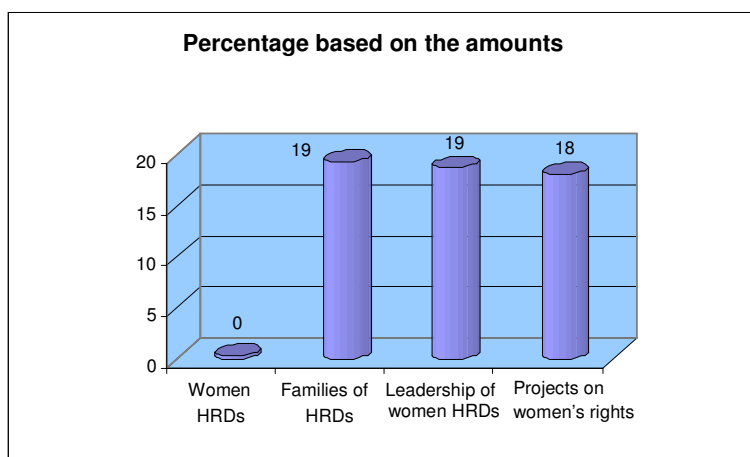
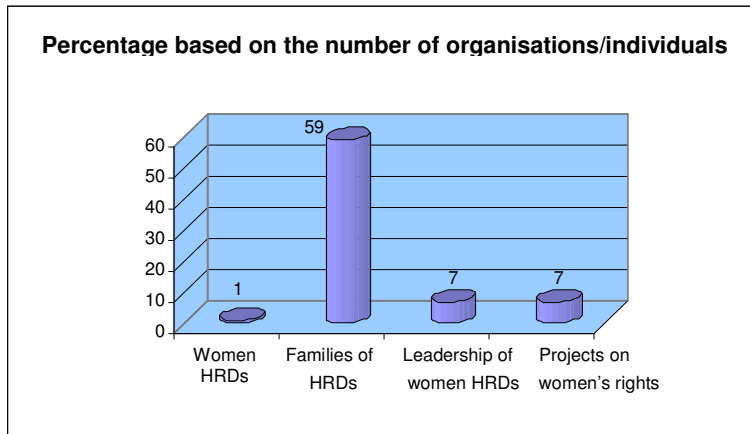
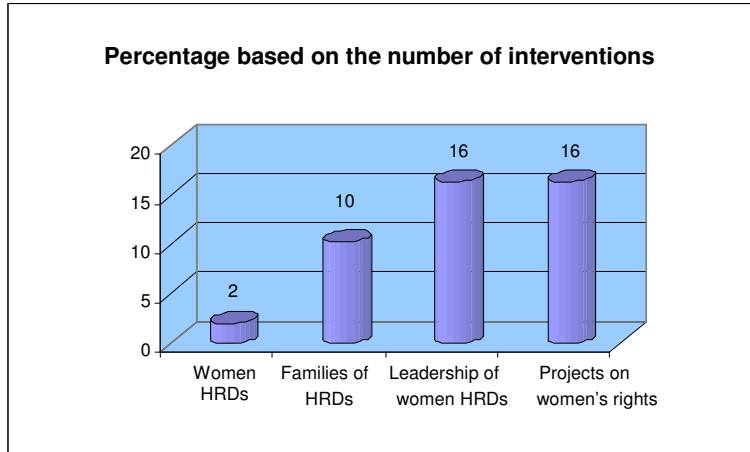


*Within the scope of its interventions in 2008, the Foundation paid particular attention to strengthening the coordination of the activities of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) at the national and regional level, as well as the protection of the rights of groups that are considered particularly vulnerable. Projects aimed at strengthening the rights of these groups were submitted to the Foundation (women and children, migrants and refugees, minorities and LGBTQ).*

*Compared with 2007, there were also increases in the number of interventions intended to promote and protect the right to freedom of association (4%), and to protect the rights of migrants and refugees in countries of the south-eastern Mediterranean (5%).*

*While these thematic areas received greater emphasis, this does not mean the Foundation paid less attention to traditional concerns such as supporting and promoting human rights, as evidenced by, among other things, an increase of more than 19% in interventions designed to support the monitoring, documentation and advocacy activities of defenders with a focus on the human rights situation in countries where the political context and the status of NGOs raise particular sets of difficulties.*

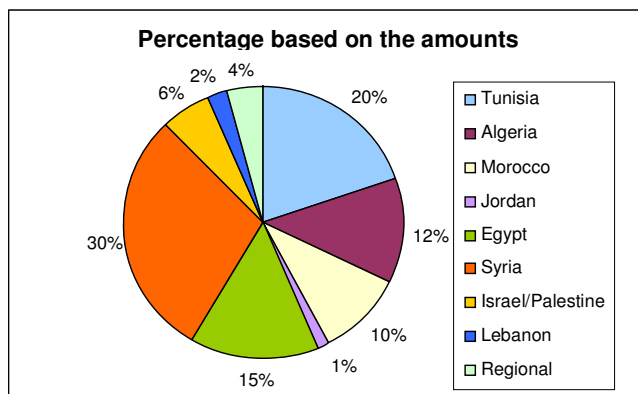
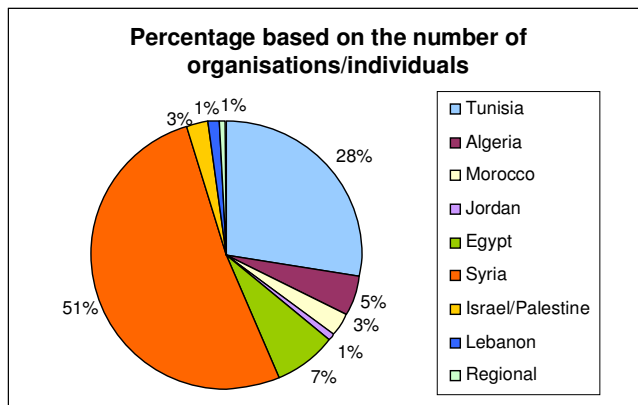
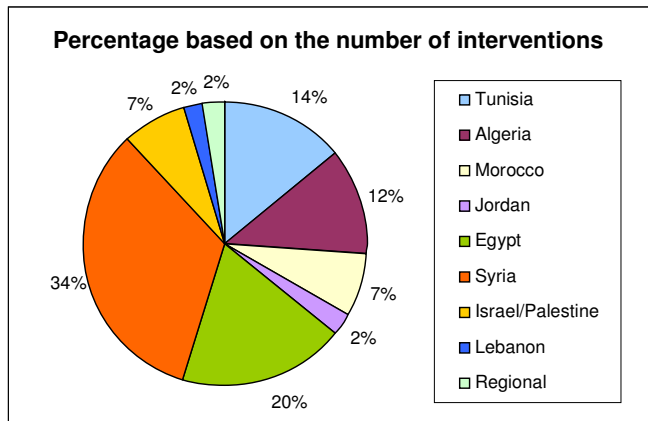
### 4.3 Gender



*The gender perspective is an integral part of the Foundation's intervention strategy.*

*The specific situation and role of women human rights defenders require special attention and, the Foundation has therefore attached particular importance to projects that were specifically designed to deal with gender issues and with strengthening the involvement and leadership of women. The proportion of interventions focused on gender issues remained relatively unchanged compared to the previous year.*

#### 4.4 Countries



*Against the background of broad national and international political trends, the year 2008 has brought into focus the needs of human rights defenders active in Syria, Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria.*

*Independent NGOs in these countries are seldom, if ever, given the possibility of having their activities legally recognised, and thus have only limited access to domestic or foreign funding. As a result, they have only limited scope for carrying out their normal operations and pursuing their activities over the long term. For these reasons, the Foundation continued to make these countries priority areas for intervention in 2008.*

*The reduction in the number of grants given to defenders in Palestine, Israel and Lebanon relative to 2007 mainly reflected the fact that many other sources of funding and support were available to human rights organisations and defenders in those countries.*

## **5. Follow-up, Sustainability and Organisational Issues**

### 5.1. Meetings and visits to the region

In addition to conducting regular electronic consultations, the Board held three meetings – in March, September and December 2008 – to oversee the implementation of the Foundation’s activities and develop strategies to assist human rights NGOs and defenders in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Furthermore, EMHRF representatives took part in NGO forums and travelled to four countries in the region to meet human rights defenders and beneficiaries of Foundation funding. These visits and meetings were mainly intended to obtain clarifications about funding requests, and to allow meetings with recipients in order to assess and follow-up on their situation. The visits also provided an opportunity to meet representatives of civil society, international organisations and foreign missions, assess the general situation and identify the most pressing needs in light of the Foundation’s mandate.

The Council of Representatives of the EMHRF, which includes more than 80 NGOs and defenders from the Euro-Mediterranean region, met in December 2008 to discuss the work already performed by Foundation as well as future activities intended to provide effective support for human rights defenders. Efforts to strengthen contacts and coordination among national, regional and international initiatives involved in the promotion and protection of human rights defenders are part of the steps needed to provide effective support to protect defenders and allow them to continue their work.

### 5.2. Information and communication

In 2008, the EMHRF maintained its policy of confidentiality regarding most of the information pertaining to the beneficiaries of its funding. This policy was adopted and has been pursued because of the serious risks potentially threatening the activities and persons for which funding is requested or has been granted, as well as other defenders working for the promotion and defence of human rights in countries of the South-Mediterranean region. The Foundation nonetheless maintains the transparency of its activities by providing its major donors with detailed information on its interventions and activities in support of human rights NGOs, groups and defenders in the region.

The Foundation has also updated and expanded its website on a regular basis, in particular by defining clearly the criteria governing urgent and standard funding requests, as well as setting out the deadlines for submitting requests, in its three working languages (Arabic, English and French), to ensure that these basic details and documents are easily accessible to all at <http://www.emhrf.org/>.

A leaflet summarising the Foundation’s activities in support of human rights defenders has been published in Arabic, English and French, and is distributed at meetings, during visits in the region, etc.

### 5.3. Fund-raising and outreach

During 2008, the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders enjoyed the trust of, and received generous contributions from, the Foreign Ministry of the Netherlands, the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).

The Foundation also worked actively to diversify its own sources of funding in an effort to broaden its prospects for pursuing and increasing its activities, given the regional context in which it operates. For example, the Foundation approached and on several occasions met different members of the European Parliament as well as representatives of the European Commission to promote its goals and its work, and to explore funding opportunities made possible by the 2007-2010 Strategy Paper of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), in which priority was given to supporting activities focusing on democracy and human rights in areas involving human rights defenders. The proposal submitted by the Foundation in response to the European Commission's call for proposals has been accepted and a three-year funding agreement has been signed. In addition, the Foundation met representatives of several European cooperation agencies and organised a visit to the U.S. eastern seaboard in the latter part of 2008. The purpose of this visit was not only to meet potential donors but also to promote the Foundation's work to NGOs, research institutes, members of Congress and other stakeholders, and thus set the basis for possible future cooperation in support of human rights defenders in the Middle East and North Africa. The Foundation hopes that partnership opportunities will materialise in 2009.

And finally, the Foundation remains an associate member of the European Foundation Center (EFC)<sup>9</sup>, an international association of foundations that seeks, among other things, to foster cooperation and the sharing of information in Europe and beyond.

#### 5.4. Risks analysis and sustainability

The main risks associated with the provision of financial assistance to human rights defenders in countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean that have been identified by the Foundation are the following:

- ***The risk that governments in the region may react by seeking to block or impede the access of human rights defenders to Foundation funding.*** The Foundation could be the target of malicious criticism claiming that it is “a tool for conducting subversive and destabilising activities orchestrated by agents of foreign powers”. The transparency of its operations, combined with the high reputation of its Board members, the significant level of support received from its main donors at its inception and the widely recognised credibility of the EMHRN as a uniting partner between various components of civil society and within the European Parliament are all elements that, over time, will dissipate the suspicions and opposition of hostile groups and states.
- ***The risk that the repression targeting human rights defenders who are the recipients of Foundation funding could get worse.*** To date, the assistance provided by the Foundation has not led to physical, legal or psychological repression targeting defenders because of the strict application of confidentiality in handling funding requests, decisions and transfers. The principle of confidentiality extends to all documents that are made public as they contain no references to the names of beneficiaries or the amounts granted. In addition, communications are protected by encryption. The Foundation does, however, provide its major donors with information on its activities in general, honouring the principle of transparency while exercising the utmost vigilance.

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<sup>9</sup> EFC is an international association of foundations and funders that is dedicated to: creating an enabling legal and fiscal environment for foundations; documenting the foundation 'landscape'; strengthening the infrastructure of the sector; and promoting collaboration both among foundations and between foundations and other actors in Europe and beyond.



- ***The risk that funding could be blocked or intercepted by someone other than the recipient defender.*** The results to date have been satisfactory and all the funds provided by the Foundation have reached their intended destinations. The Foundation's Board and Secretariat are responsible for ensuring that funding is granted to legitimate natural and legal persons under private law. A number of precautions are taken and a certain amount of information is collected from the defender before, during and after the decision process. The Foundation also taps into a network of trusted contacts in the region to obtain reliable information that enables it to act in a targeted and secure manner.
- ***The risk that Foundation interventions may have an unwanted destabilising impact within civil society (intensification of rivalries, disinformation, etc.) or that the funds granted may be misused or used fraudulently (embezzlement, corruption, etc.).*** To date, these risks have been avoided but the potential for such risks is under constant monitoring. At the same time, the total amounts allocated to projects are such that they are an important limit on any possibility of misuse. The rigorous assessment conducted before a decision is made and the moral commitment made by recipients also tends to limit such risks. Beneficiaries must follow a number of steps to ensure accountability and the Foundation monitors recipients on an ongoing basis. The Foundation also reserves the right to require that the funds granted be reimbursed should the goal of a contract not be met.

The sustainability of the Foundation's work is based on the following elements:

- The ability of human rights defenders to work in the region is greatly strengthened by the availability of interventions that are flexible, quick and localised, a fact which makes these interventions all the more necessary.
- The Foundation has direct access to members of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network and is therefore in a position to take advantage of a unique, highly qualified source of knowledge and quickly obtain the detailed and reliable information it needs to pursue its work, thus improving the quality and targeting of its interventions.
- The Foundation remains in regular contact with its partners and with civil society in the context of its follow-up activities and its regular visits to the region, and can thus respond to changes in local and regional circumstances and to the needs expressed by defenders.
- The Foundation focuses its attention on a clearly circumscribed region, which enables it to develop a specific profile and to be a trustworthy actor in its field of intervention.
- The Foundation encourages the much-needed participation and cooperation of other national, regional and international organisations in efforts to provide long-term institutional support to defenders.
- The Foundation carefully measures the risks involved in providing low-level funding to defenders at risk, small emerging NGOs and innovative activities.
- Thanks to its close contacts with actors and organisations in civil society, the Foundation is in a position to provide advice and act as an intermediary between defenders and international donors when a funding request is clearly such that it could be supported by another organisation.
- Last but not least, the right and freedom of association is a central component of the Foundation's intervention strategy.

### 5.5. Internal Governance

The composition of the Board remained unchanged in 2008. The Board has nine members, who contribute to its work on a volunteer basis.

The staff of the Foundation's Secretariat during the year comprised the following persons:

- Anne-Sophie Schaeffer (a graduate in international public law) employed on a full-time basis as programme coordinator based in Copenhagen.
- Katrine Høybye Frederiksen (a graduate in foreign languages) was hired in July 2008 as a full-time administrative secretary based in Copenhagen.
- Basma Shaheen was hired as part-time assistant based in Copenhagen during most of the year 2008, but in November 2008 she was replaced by Chafia Alliche (preparing a thesis in foreign languages and international development).

The Board issued a job advertisement for the position as executive director in June and selected three candidates for interviews. Two candidates withdrew their applications because of the location of the post, and the Board conducted an interview with the third candidate in September. Although this candidate had genuine skills, he was not selected for the position because he could not be operational immediately. The Board will define in greater detail the profile deemed desirable after having analysed all possible options in 2009.

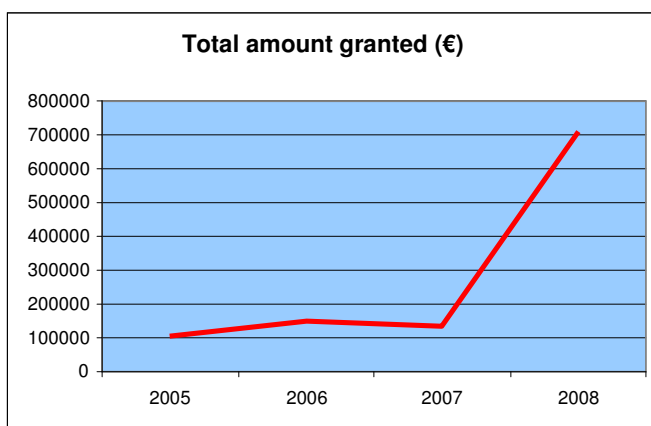
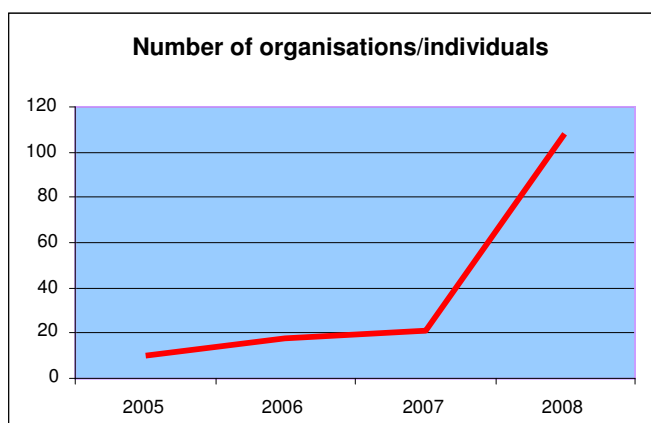
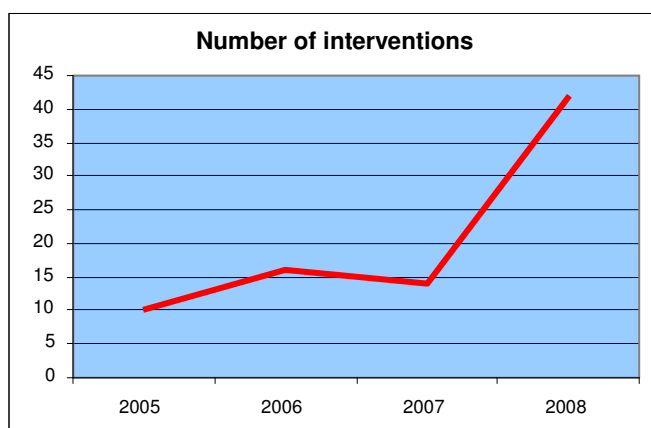
The Foundation also benefited from organisational services provided by the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network, in particular accounting, computer and administrative services.

The audit of the Foundation's accounts was performed by an independent auditor, *Deloitte*, Copenhagen.

## Appendix 1: Overview of EMHRF Interventions 2005-2008

The Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders (EMHRF) lent its support on more than eighty occasions with the objective of supporting 157 defenders of human rights – whether they be individuals or associations – in the South-Mediterranean region during the period 2005- 2008. The total amount of financial support granted by the EMHRF represents more than €1 million.

The increase in the number of interventions by the EMHRF is portrayed in the graphs below:



*These graphs show that a major transformation has taken place in the Foundation's interventions in 2008, bringing the total increase between 2005 and 2008 to more than 320%.*

*This transformation is explained by a significant increase in the number of requests received from defenders not only as a result of the deteriorating conditions but also because during these four years the Foundation developed a specific profile as a reliable partner in the region.*

*These developments have resulted in increases of 575% in the amount of funding granted to defenders between 2005 and 2008, and 980% in the number of defenders receiving support.*

## 1. Narrative Assessment of Interventions

The support provided by the Foundation to human rights defenders can be characterised by the three major categories of intervention which follow. As noted above, however, some interventions – particularly aiming at strengthening human and operational resources – cannot be clearly distinguished from interventions in support of innovative activities.

### 1.1. Urgent interventions in support of human rights defenders facing difficulties or at risk

The EMHRF provided short-term support in a rapid, tangible and discrete manner to human rights defenders in order to enable them to overcome their present plight and / or strengthen the visibility of their actions and the prospects for pursuing their activities at a decisive time:

1. The EMHRF has notably supported human rights defenders and their families who were undergoing psychological harassment and malicious legal proceedings in order to enable them to overcome their plight and to pursue their activities;
2. The EMHRF has provided its support to human rights defenders whose lives were threatened due to serious health problems, in order to enable them to obtain specialised medical and pharmaceutical treatment either in their country or abroad. This support has been given because of serious violations of their rights and / or because it was impossible for them to pay for these costs due to their constant engagement in the defence of human rights;
3. The EMHRF has provided its support to associations of defenders targeted by the authorities (refusal or suspension of legal recognition, freezing of accounts, etc...) in order to enable them to reorganise their strategies long enough for them to obtain a stable status;
4. Lastly, the EMHRF has provided its support to projects whose success mainly depended on the time factor – in order to increase visibility and prospects for pursuing their activities. This support has been given because of their difficulties in obtaining funds from other donors in appropriate conditions with regard to time periods and safety.

### 1.2. Bridging interventions to strengthen human and operational resources

The EMHRF provided medium and long-term support to enable defenders to strengthen their capacities in order to create new structures or implement their activities in an effective manner in the region:

1. The EMHRF supported the hiring and training of staff necessary to strengthen the action and the capacities of human rights organisations in their search for funds from other institutions.
2. The EMHRF provided its support in paying rent and in paying for the equipment necessary to strengthen the visibility of the action of human rights organisations.

The main objective of these interventions was to strengthen visibility and secure prospects for pursuing the actions of defenders in countries where the political and associative context is particularly difficult.

### 1.3. Interventions in support of innovative initiatives in light of the regional context

The EMHRF has provided support to projects whose thematic areas were innovative and/or had priority importance with regard to the regional context. The Foundation has paid particular attention to strengthening the coordination of activities on a national and regional level and to strengthening the protection of rights of groups which were seen to be particularly vulnerable or which required special assistance – in the following main areas (this list is not exhaustive):

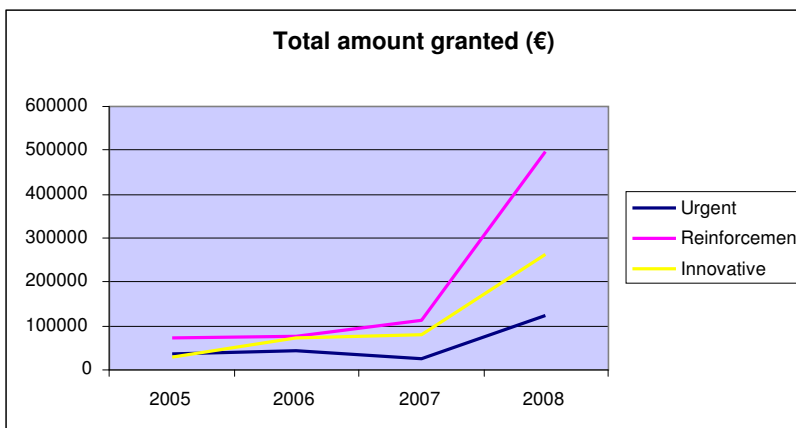
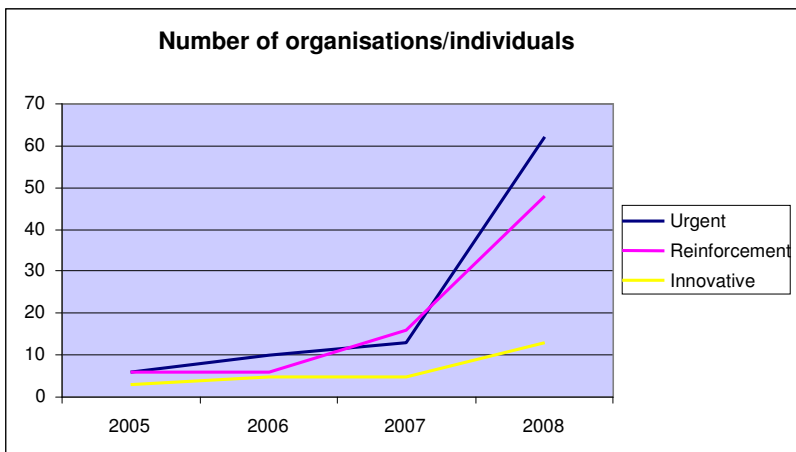
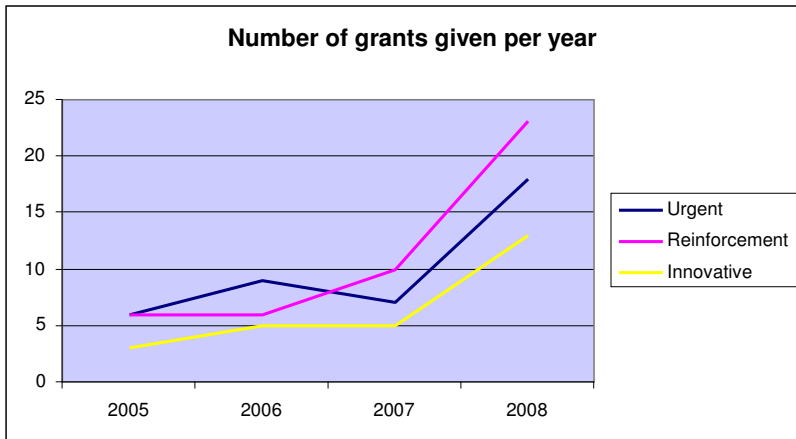
- medical, psychological and legal support to defenders, prisoners of conscience;
- strengthening economic, social and cultural rights;
- strengthening the participation of women and young people and also defending their rights;
- fighting homophobia and defending the rights of LGBTQ;
- strengthening the protection of minorities rights;
- strengthening the protection of migrants and refugees rights;

- the fight against impunity;
- the right and freedom of association.

## 2. Quantitative Assessment of Interventions

To increase the readability of the EMHRF's interventions for the period 2005-2008, the graphs below are presented depending on the:

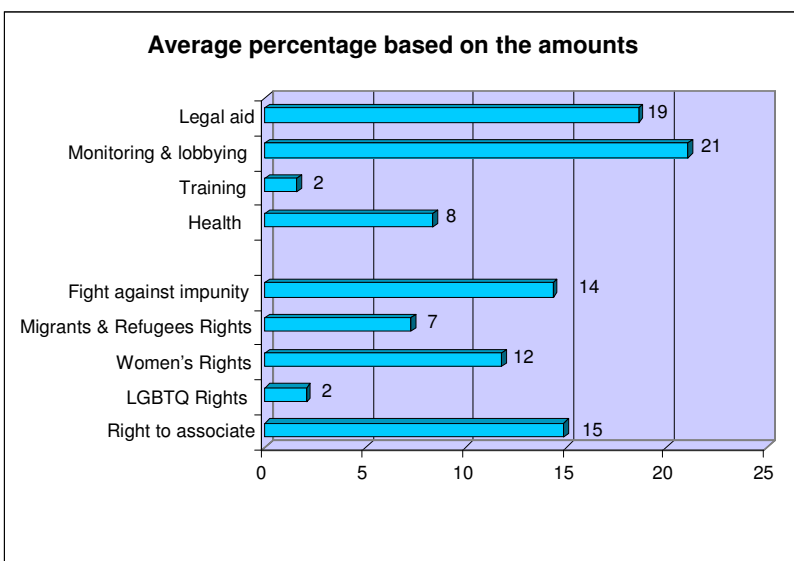
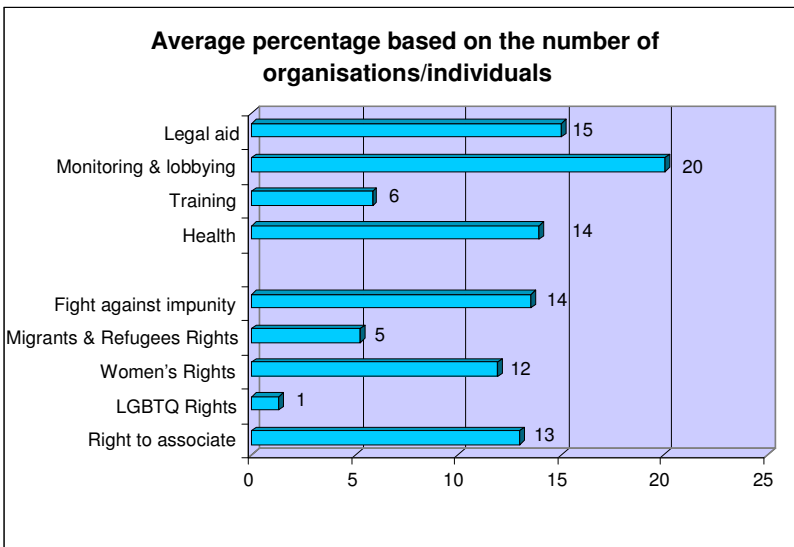
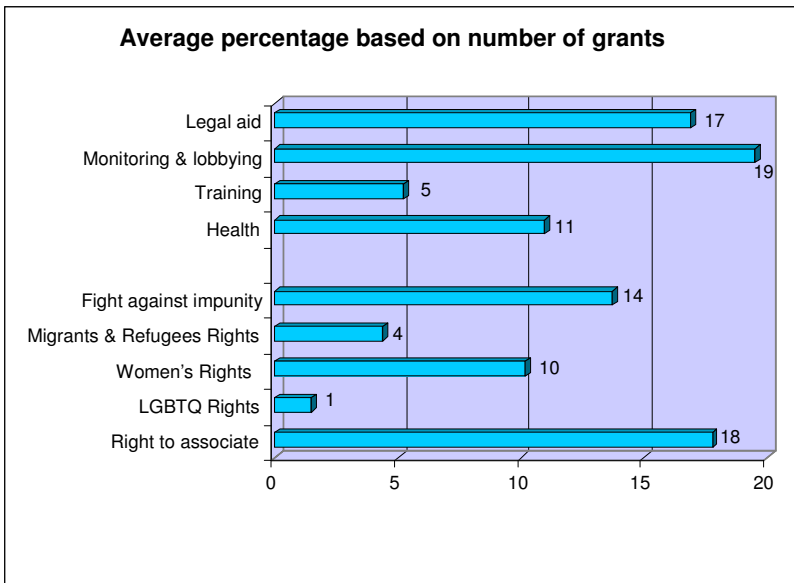
### 2.1. Types of intervention



*The graphs reflect the emphasis given by the Foundation to interventions designed to support the human and physical resources of independent NGOs. In some cases, defenders, who often operate on a volunteer basis, receive ad hoc support for specific projects. The requests received by the Foundation show, however, that many suffer from a lack of crucial core funds needed to carry out their activities on a more professional basis and to establish their organisations on a more permanent basis so as to heighten their visibility and increase their prospects for pursuing their activities.*

*The increase in the number of defenders receiving emergency support in 2008 is explained mainly by the levels of repression targeting groups advocating for democratic reforms that respects the rights of citizens, guarantees freedoms of expression and association, and puts an end to all types of discrimination. Despite this, the total amount of emergency funding remains low because these interventions have a ceiling of €5,000. The rapid availability of small amounts is nonetheless essential as it can have a considerable impact on the physical and psychological ability of the defender to carry out his or her activities.*

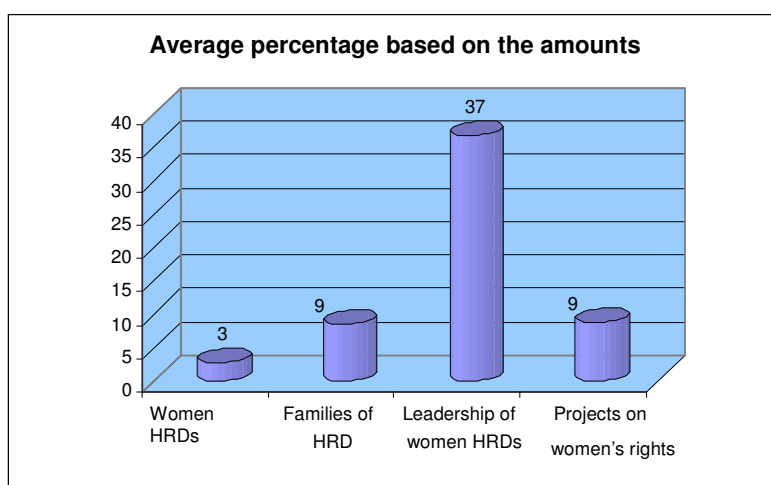
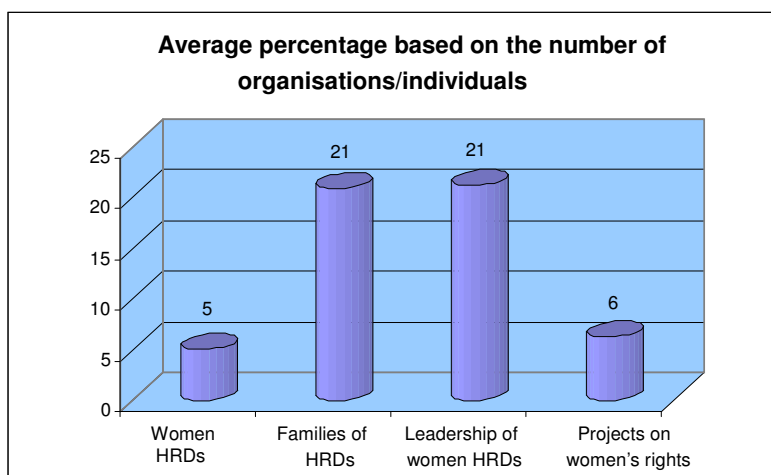
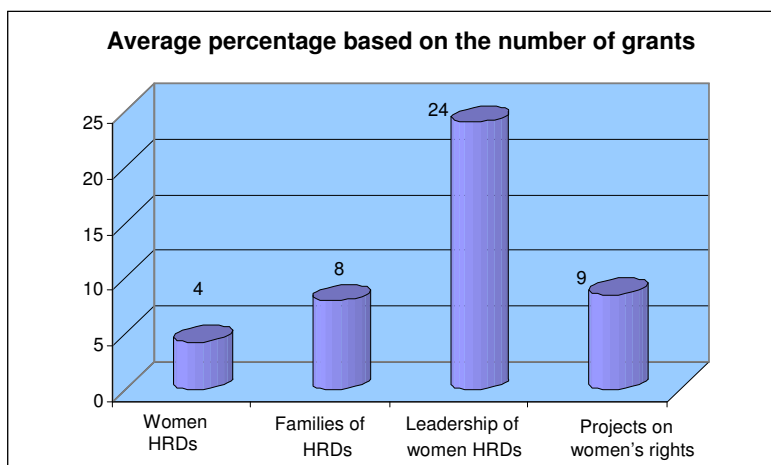
## 2.2. Thematic areas 2005-2008



*Over the period 2005-2008, the Foundation devoted efforts to supporting initiatives aimed at fighting impunity and promoting the right to freedom of association. In addition, it paid particular attention to strengthening the rights of groups that are considered more vulnerable because of their specific characteristics and of the context in which they carry out their activities (women and children, migrants and refugees, minorities and LGBTQ).*

*Despite this focus, the Foundation did not neglect more traditional activities supporting and promoting human rights in the region (monitoring and documentation on the human rights situation, free legal aid to victims of violations, medical and psychological support to defenders, training).*

### 2.3 Gender 2005-2008



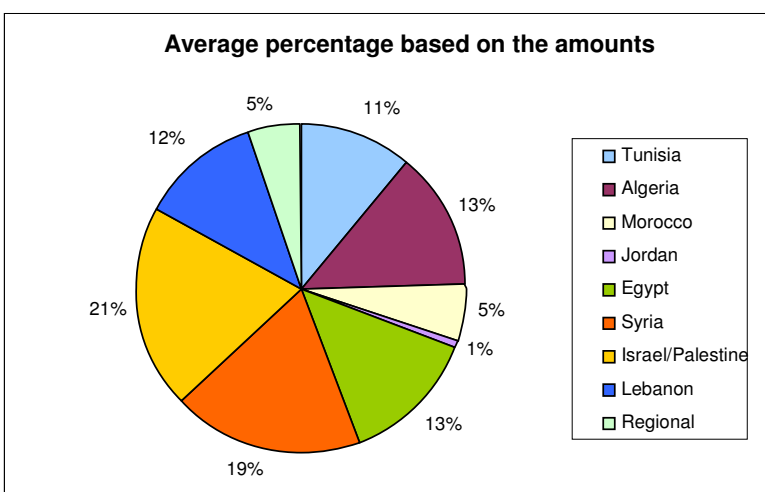
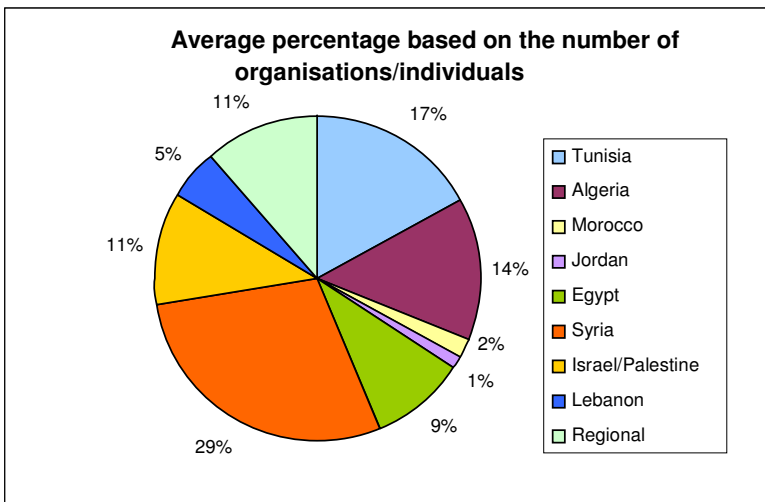
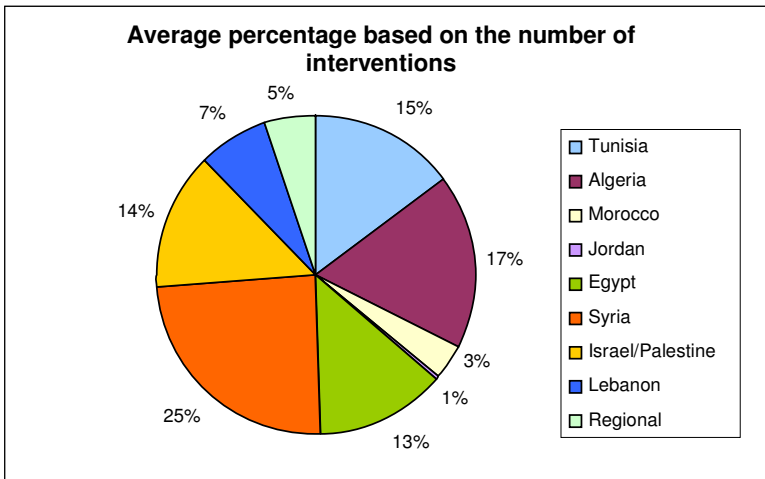
*The issue of the rights and role of women defenders is an integral part of the Foundation's intervention strategy.*

*Over the period 2005-2008, the Foundation put greater emphasis on strengthening the involvement of women defenders as essential agents for change in the region. The enhanced involvement and leadership of women plays a major role in areas such as the promotion of social justice, the prevention of violence and respect for the rights of women, and the constant mainstreaming of gender issues in programmes designed to promote and protect human rights.*

*Thanks to the pressures exerted by women's defenders and organisations, several countries in the region have been led to change family laws, which were often used as legal justification for different types of discrimination.*

*Strengthening the participation of women is thus an essential component of the struggle to strengthen democracy and human rights in the region.*

## 2.4 Countries 2005-2008



The funding requests received by the Foundation in 2005-2008 are a reflection of broad national and international political trends in the region, as well as conflict situations with tragic consequences. Independent NGOs are seldom, if ever, able to secure legal recognition in Syria, Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt, and thus have only limited access to domestic or foreign funding sources. As a result, they have only limited scope for carrying out their normal operations and pursuing their activities over the long term. In addition, the stalled Middle East peace process, the growing confrontations between Palestinian militias, as well as the Israeli embargo and attacks against the Gaza Strip, have led to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in a context where ever-growing human rights violations and impunity occur.

The Foundation has given a priority response to the requests received from defenders operating in this environment, taking into account the standard of living in these countries (which explains, in particular, the higher amount of funds granted to defenders in Palestine and Israel).

The lower percentage of grants provided to defenders in Lebanon, Morocco and Jordan reflects above all the availability of other funding sources to defenders in those countries, where many NGOs have more extensive resources at their disposal.